(a) Whether Government are aware that the amendments in the Indian Patent Act, 1970 through ordinance issued in December 2004 would seriously hit the Information Technology boom in India;

(b) if so, the details thereof and Government's response thereto and

(c) what steps are proposed to be taken in this regard so as to save the software sectors from being patented?

THE MINISTER OF STATE IN THE MINISTRY OF COMMUNICATIONS AND INFORMATION TECHNOLOGY (DR. SHAKEEL AHMAD): (a) to (c) The amendments in the Indian Patent Act, 1970 relating to patenting of computer software brought through an ordinance promulgated in Deceber, 2004 by way of modification to the existing Section 3(k) was in the nature of a clarification and in any case was withdrawn during the consideration of the bill in Budget Session of Parliament. In effect, this implies that the position in this regard is the same as after the Patent (Amedment) Act, 2002.

Absorbtion of Extra Departmental Employees

3739. SHRI T.T.V. DHINAKARAN: Will the Minister of COMMUNICATIONS AND INFORMATION TECHNOLOGY be pleased to state:

(a) the number of extra departmental employees (EDS) attached to various post offices in the country:

(b) whether it is a fact that many of them have put in 5 to 10 years and even more years of service; and

(c) whether Government are considering to absorb them in the department against regular vacancies in group 'C' and 'D' posts instead of filling such vacancies through direct recruitment?

THE MINISTER OF STATE IN THE MINISTRY OF COMMUNICATIONS AND INFORMATION TECHNOLOGY (DR. SHAKEEL AHMAD): (a) 2,98,571 Gramin Dak Sevaks earlier called Extra Departmental Agents are attached to various post offices in the country as on 31.3.2004.

(b) Yes, Sir.

Gramin Dak Sevaks are considered for appointment against regular vacancies in group 'C' and 'D' posts in terms of the provisions of the Recruitment Rules subject to their fulfilling the eligibility conditions etc.

Recruitment of Gramin Dak Sevaks against departmental posts is direct recruitment and not a promotion.

Expansion of GSM Service in Tamil Nadu

3740. SHRI R. SHUNMUGASUNDARAM: Will the Minister of COMMUNICATIONS AND INFORMATION TECHNOLOGY be pleased to state:

(a) the number of more communication towers for Global Short Messaging (GSM) services that will be established in Tamil Nadu; and

(b) the area expected to be covered this year for expanding the GSM service in Tamil Nadu?

THE MINISTER OF STATE IN THE MINISTRY OF COMMUNICATIONS AND INFORMATION TECHNOLOGY (DR. SHAKEEL AHMAD): (a) and (b) Bharat Sanchar Nigam Limited (BSNL) has planned to install about 1466 additional Base Stations for strengthening its existing mobile network of Tamil Nadu State including Chennai for providing mobile services up to block headquarter level subject to business and commercial viability.

Setting up of Quality Service Fund

3741. SHRIMATI N.P. DURGA: Will the Minister of COMMUNICATIONS AND INFORMATION TECHNOLOGY be pleased to state:

(a) whether it is a fact that the universal postal union of the U.N. has set up mail "Quality Services Fund" in the country for improving the quality of services in mail operations;

(b) if so, the details of the project;

(c) the States that have been covered under Quality Services Fund;

(d) how many projects have so far been implemented under their scheme, State-wise; and

(e) the details of States where the projects have so far been implemented?

THE MINISTER OF STATE IN THE MINISTRY OF COMMUNICATIONS AND INFORMATION TECHNOLOGY (DR. SHAKEEL AHMAD): (a) to(e) The Universal Postal Union (UPU), a specialized agency of the United Nations with a membership of 190 countries decided to set up a fund called the Quality of Service Fund at the 22nd UPU Congress held in 1999 at Beijing. The objective of the Fund was to bring about improvement in the quality of letter mail processing and delivery in developing postal